

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 0923

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS PINS MU

SUBJECT: ALL QUIET MILITARILY IN DHOFAR

1. SUMMARY. WITH OMAN'S SOUTHERN PROVINCE OF DHOFAR ONE MONTH INTO THE ANNUAL SUMMER MONSOON SEASON, MILITARY SITUATION THERE REMAINS CALM. LAST THREE MONTHS PASSED QUIETLY IN WESTERN HALF OF THE MOUNTAINS, WHILE SPORADIC FIRING AND MINING INCIDENTS IN EASTERN SECTOR WERE INSIGNIFICANT. SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES HAVE BEEN MAINLY RECONFIGURED INTO TRAINING POSTURE. BULK OF IRANIAN FORCES ARE AT MANSTON, IN WEST-CENTRAL DHOFAR, WITH NO SIGN THEY WILL SOON BE REDUCED IN NUMBER OF WITHDRAWN. DHOFAR BRIGADE COMMANDER SEES RAPID ROAD DEVELOPMENT IN THE JABAL AS BEST MEANS OF ASSISRING LOCAL POPULACE AND KEEPING THEIR LOYALTY IN YEARS AHEAD, BUT SAYS LITTLE IS BEING DONE ON THIS BY OMANIS THEMSELVES, WHO ARE STILL AWAITING SAUDI FUNDS TO GO AHEAD. END SUMMARY.

2. BRIEFING GIVEN ME ON JULY 26 IN SALALAH BY DHOFAR BRI-
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GADE COMMANDER, BRIG. AKEHURST, CONFIRMED THAT MILITARY

SITUATION THERE HAS REMAINED VERY QUIET SINCE DECEMBER 1975. WESTERN HALF OF THE JABAL HAS BEEN ABSOLUTELY PEACEFUL SINCE SHELLING AND MORTAR FIRE AROUND SAF POSITIONS AT SARFAIT CEASED AT END OF APRIL. IN RECENT WEEKS, SAF INTELLIGENCE HAS REPORTED A CONCENTRATION OF 50 TO 100 PFLO PERSONNEL IN DENSELY-COVERED TERRAIN BETWEEN SARFAIT AND THE BORDER. IT HAS ALSO DETECTED THREE SMALL UNITS OF PDRY REGULAR FORCES POSITIONED BETWEEN THIS PFLO GROUP AND SARFAIT, AND SAF INTERPRETS THIS AS A PDRY EFFORT TO MAKE SURE PFLO DOES NOT DISTTURB THE PEACE. AKEHURST COMMENTED THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE QUESTION, ANYHOW, AS TO JUST WHERE THE DHOFAR-PDRY BORDER LINE RUNS AND THAT CONSEQUENTLY THE OMANIS ARE NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THESE SMALL ENEMY CONCENTRATIONS SO LONG AS THEY KEEP TO THEMSELVES.

3. IN THE EASTERN JABAL, A FEW SHOOTING AND MINING INCIDENTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE THIS SPRING BUT NOTHING SERIOUS. FOR EXAMPLE, TEN MORTAR ROUNDS WERE FIRED AROUND TAWI ATAIR ON JUNE 9 APPARENTLY IN CELEBRATION OF ELEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION. THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES AND NO DAMAGE. (AKEHURST DISMISSED PROPAGANDA OVER ADEN RADIO IN MID-JUNE ALLEGED SERIES OF SHARP ATTACKS AGAINST OMANI FORCES ON/ABOUT JUNE 9 SAYING THIS WAS REHASH OF ATTACKES IN VARIOUS PAST YEARS.) ON COASTAL PLAN NORTH OF MARBAT 3 OR 4 MINES HAVE DETONATED UNDER MILITARY AND CIVILIAN VEHICLES BUT LUCKILY NONE HAVE CAUSED CASUALTIES.

4. AKEHURST NOTED THERE ARE PERHAPS 40 REMAINING GUERRILLAS IN SMALL GROUPS AROUND TAWI ATAIR, IN AL-AMRI TRIBAL DISTRICT. HE EXPECTS THEY MAY LOSE HEART FOR CONTINUING OPPOSITION SOON, NOW THAT THEIR LEADER, RAJAH MASOUD, HAS SURRENDERED. MASOUD GAVE HIMSELF UP AT MARBAT IN EARLY JULY AND HAS PROVIDED USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT NUMBERS AND ARMAMENT OF REMAINING DISSIDENTS. SAF SOON WILL ESTABLISH SEVEN NEW POWITIONS IN GENERAL VICINITY OF TAWI ATAIR TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR REMAINING GUERRILLAS TO OBTAIN FOOD AND OTHER ASSISTANCE FROM LOCAL POPULATION.

5. AKEHURST CONFIRMED THAT IRANIAN FORCES, SOMETHING AROUND TWO THOUSAND, ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY IN BARRACKS AT MANSTON.
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SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY HOPES FOR EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF IRANIANS, INDICATING THEY NO LONGER SERVE A USEFUL MILITARY PURPOSE AND COULD BE FLOWN BACK TO DHOFAR QUICKLY IF NEED AROSE. AS TO THE JORDANIAN ENGINEERING COMPANY, AKEHURST REMARKED THAT IT CONTINUES ASSIST SAF IN EXTENDING WATER DISTRIBUTION PIPELINES AND MAINTAINING ROADS TO POPULATED LOCATIONS IN THE MOUNTAINS, THOUGH ITS EFFORTS CERTAINLY ARE NOT INDISPENSIBLE.

6. IT IS AKEHURST'S VIEW THAT FURTHER IMPROVEMENT AND EXTENSION OF ROAD NETWORK IS FAR AND AWAY THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY TO ASSURE ECONOMIC PROGRESS ON THE JABAL. HE BELIEVES THERE IS SUFFICIENT MONEY IN HANDS OF JABALI POPULACE (INCLUDING RECEIPTS FROM CATTLE SALES, FROM PAYROLL OF THE FIRQA, AND ROM REWARDS FOR TURNING IN WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION) SO THAT THEY WOULD READILY PROCEED TO MAKE THEIR OWN ARRANGEMENTS FOR HOUSING AND NECESSITIES OF LIFE WITH SALALAH MERCHANTS AND CONTRACTORS PROVIDED EASIER ACCESS TO THE COASTAL PLAIN AND MOVEMENT AROUND THE JABAL WERE ASSURED. HE MENTIONED THAT OMAN'S PLAN FOR ROADBUILDING ON THE JABAL HAS PRICE TAG OF R.O. 70 MILLION (DOLLARS 200 MILLION) AND THAT THIS IS ITS FIRST SPENDING PRIORITY IF SAUDI ARABIA EVER COMES THROUGH WITH FUNDS AS HAS BEEN HOPED FOR PAST SIX MONTHS. BUT AKEHURST CONFIRMED THAT OMANIS SEEM TO HAVE DONE NOTHING ON THEIR OWN TO MOVE THIS PROGRAM FORWARD WHILE WAITING FOR SAUDIS TO PROVIDE WHEREWITHAL.

7. AKEHURST'S TWO-YEAR TOUR CONCLUDES IN LATE AUGUST AND HIS SUCCESSOR, ALSO SECONDED FROM BRITISH ARMY, WILL BE BRIG. CHARLES HUXTABLE. AKEHURST IS BEING POSTED TO MOD IN LONDON.
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